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628 When a man has killed a neighbour a cow is often immediately paid over in earnest so that the community may remain at peace. It must not be supposed, however, that the ease with which feuds are settled is an indication of lack of strong indignation or that the difficulty with which they are settled is an indication of greater indignation.

628 182 Feuds are settled with comparative ease in a restricted social milieu where the structural distance between the participants is narrow, but they are more difficult to settle as the milieu expands, until one reaches intertribal relations where no compensation is offered or expected. The degree of social control over feuds varies with the size of the tribal segment, and Nuer themselves have often explained this to me. Long and intense feuds may take place between tertiary tribal sections, but an effort is generally made to close them, for a segment of this size has a strong sense of community, close lineage ties, and some economic interdependence. However, it is far less easy to stop a feud between persons of different tertiary sections than to stop a feud in a village or between neighbouring villages, where a quick and permanent settlement is assured, and unsettled feuds between sections of this size tend to accumulate. This is especially the case where there has not been a single death resulting from a personal quarrel but several deaths in a fight between the two sections. When a fight has taken place between secondary tribal sections there is little chance of exacting vengeance except by a general fight, and people feel less the need to submit to mediation since they have few social contacts and these of a temporary kind, for the relative ease with which feuds are settled is an indication of the cohesion of the community. The larger the segment involved the greater the anarchy that prevails. People say that there is payment of blood-cattle between primary tribal sections, but they do not greatly feel the need of paying it. The tribe is the last stage in this increasing anarchy. It still has nominal political unity, and it is held that feuds between its most distant members can be settled by compensation, but often they are not settled, and if many men are killed in a big fight between large sections nothing is done to avenge them or to pay compensation for their deaths. Their kinsmen abide their time till there is another

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fight. The political integument may in consequence be stretched eventually to the breaking-point and the tribe split into two. The rent between sections enlarges until they have little to do with each other beyond occasional uniting for raids; and feuds between their members are settled, if at all, with greater difficulty and casualness.

VII

The likelihood of a homicide developing into a blood-feud, its force, and its chances of settlement are thus dependent on the structural interrelations of the persons concerned. Moreover, the blood-feud may be viewed as a structural movement between political segments by which the form of the Nuer political system, as we know it, is maintained. It is true that only close agnatic kin of both sides are immediately and directly involved, but feuds between persons belonging to different tribal sections sooner or later influence the interrelations of the whole communities to which they belong.

The kinsmen of a slain man try to kill the *gwan thunga*, the slayer, but they have a right to kill any of his close agnates (*gaat gwanlen*). They must not kill sons of the mother's brother, father's sister, or mother's sister, because these people do not belong to the slayer's lineage. Also, only the minimal lineages on both sides are directly involved in the feud. However, the significance of the feud may be held to lie less in the ease of settlement within smaller groups than in the difficulties of settlement within larger groups, which participate indirectly in the conflict. We have noted that people at feud may not eat in the same homesteads, and, as a man eats in all the homesteads of his village, the villagers at once come within the scope of the prohibition and enter into a state of ritual opposition to each other. All the people of a village are generally in some way related to one another and have also a strong sense of community, so that if any fighting occurs between their village and another on account of a feud in which some of their members are involved the whole village is likely to be drawn into it. Thus at dances men of each village who attend them arrive in war formation and maintain an unbroken line throughout the dance, so that if one of them is attacked the others are at his side and

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are bound to assist him. People not directly affected by the feud may thus be compelled to assist the principals.

We have noted, moreover, that the intensity of a feud and the manner of its prosecution depend on the structural relationship of the persons concerned in the political system. A feud cannot be tolerated within a village and it is impossible to maintain one for a long period between nearby villages. Consequently, although fights most frequently occur within a village or between neighbouring villages and camps, a feud, in the sense of a relation between parties between whom there is an unsettled debt of homicide which can be settled either by vengeance or by payment of compensation—a temporary state of active hostility which does not compel immediate settlement but which requires eventual conclusion—can only persist between tribal sections which are near enough to each other for the maintenance of actively hostile relations and far enough from each other for these relations not to inhibit essential social contacts of a more peaceable kind. A feud has little significance unless there are social relations of some kind which can be broken off and resumed, and, at the same time, these relations necessitate eventual settlement if there is not to be complete cleavage. The function of the feud, viewed in this way, is, therefore, to maintain the structural equilibrium between opposed tribal segments which are, nevertheless, politically fused in relation to larger units.

Through the feud whole sections are left in a state of hostility towards one another, without the hostility leading to frequent warfare, for the scope of direct vengeance is limited to small kinship groups and their efforts to exact it are not incessant. There is a fight between two sections and some people are killed on either side. Only those lineages which have lost a member are in a state of direct feud with the lineages which they have deprived of a member, but through common residence, local patriotism, and a network of kinship ties, the whole sections participate in the enmity that results, and the prosecution of the feuds may lead to further fighting between the communities concerned and to a multiplication of feuds between them. Thus when the Nyarkwac section of the Lou tribe fought the Leng section, the LAM lineage and the people who live with them were

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The feud is a political institution, being an approved and regulated mode of behaviour between communities within a tribe. The balanced opposition between tribal segments and their complementary tendencies towards fission and fusion, which we have seen to be a structural principle, is evident in the institution of the feud which, on the one hand, gives expression to the hostility by occasional and violent action that serves to keep the sections apart, and, on the other hand, by the means provided for settlement, prevents opposition developing into complete fission. The tribal constitution requires both elements of a feud, the need for vengeance and the means of settlement. The means of settlement is the leopard-skin chief, whose role we shall examine later. We therefore regard the feud as essential to the political system as it exists at present. Between tribes there can only be war, and through war, the memory of war, and the potentiality of war the relations between tribes are defined and expressed. Within a tribe fighting always produces feuds, and a relation of feud is characteristic of tribal segments and gives to the tribal structure a movement of expansion and contraction.

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There is, of course, no clear-cut distinction between fighting against another tribe and fighting against a segment of one's own tribe. Nuer, however, stress that the possibility of arbitration and payment of blood-wealth for deaths resulting from a fight within a tribe makes it a *ter*, feud, and that this is different from a fight between tribes, *kur*, in which no claims for compensation would be recognized. Both differ from raiding of Dinka, *pec*, and from individual duelling, *dwac*, though all fighting is *kur* in a general sense. But it is obvious that a fight in a village which at once leads to payment of compensation for deaths and a fight between tribes in which there is no compensation for deaths are two poles, and that the further we go from a village community the fights between tribal sections become more like fights between tribes in that blood-wealth is paid with increasing difficulty and infrequency, so that between primary sections the tribal value, the feeling that blood-wealth can, and even ought to, be paid, alone distinguishes their fights from fights between tribes. Here again we would emphasize the conclusion that the tribal value is relative to the structural situation.

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We would emphasize further that blood-feuds only directly involve a few persons and that though they sometimes cause violence between whole local communities—a feud in a wider sense—ordinary social contacts continue in spite of them. The strands of kinship and affinity, of age-set affiliations, and of military and even economic interests remain unbroken; and these strands act like elastic between the sections, being capable of considerable expansion by disturbed political relations, but always pulling the communities together and keeping them as a single group in relation to other groups of the same kind. As we have explained, these strands lessen in number and strength the larger the community, but they stretch even beyond tribal frontiers. Increasing anarchy, increasing difficulty in settling feuds, goes together with lessening frequency of social contacts of all kinds. Social cohesion increases as the size of the community narrows.

VIII

There are, of course, disputes between Nuer other than those about homicides, but they can be treated briefly and in direct relation to homicide and the feud. In a strict sense Nuer have no law. There are conventional compensations for damage, adultery, loss of limb, and so forth, but there is no authority with power to adjudicate on such matters or to enforce a verdict. In Nuerland legislative, judicial, and executive functions are not invested in any persons or councils. Between members of different tribes there is no question of redress; and even within a tribe, in my experience, wrongs are not brought forward in what we would call a legal form, though compensation for damage (*ruok*) is sometimes paid. A man who considers that he has suffered loss at the hands of another cannot sue the man who has caused it, because there is no court in which to cite him, even were he willing to attend it. I lived in intimacy for a year with Nuer and never heard a case brought before an individual or a tribunal of any kind, and, furthermore, I reached the conclusion that it is very rare for a man to obtain redress except by force or threat of force. The recent introduction of Government courts, before which disputes are now sometimes

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The first point to note about Nuer law is that it has not everywhere the same force within a tribe, but is relative to the position of persons in social structure, to the distance between them in the kinship, lineage, age-set, and, above all, in the political, systems. In theory one can obtain redress from any member of one's tribe, but, in fact, there is little chance of doing so when he is not a member of one's district and a kinsman. The wider the area which contains the parties to a dispute the weaker the feeling of obligation to settle it and the more difficult the task of enforcing settlement, and, consequently, the less the likelihood of it being settled. Within a village differences between persons are discussed by the elders of the village and agreement is generally and easily reached and compensation paid, or promised, for all are related by kinship and common interests. Disputes between members of nearby villages, between which there are many social contacts and ties, can also be settled by agreement, but less easily and with more likelihood of resort to force. The nearer we get to the tribe the less the chances of settlement. Law operates weakly outside a very limited radius and nowhere very effectively. The lack of social control to which we have often referred is thus shown in the weakness of law, and the structural interrelations of tribal segments are seen in the relativity of law, for Nuer law is relative like the structure itself.

A cogent reason why there is little chance of redress between members of different secondary and primary tribal sections is that the basis of law is force. We must not be mislead by an enumeration of traditional payments for damage into supposing that it is easy to exact them unless a man is prepared to use force. The club and the spear are the sanctions of rights. What chiefly makes people pay compensation is fear that the injured man and his kin may take to violence. It follows that a member of a strong lineage is in a different position from that of a member of a weak lineage. Also the chances of a man obtaining redress for an injury are less the further removed he is from the man who has injured him, since the opportunity for violence and the effectiveness of kinship backing lessen the wider the distance between the principals. Since self-help, with some backing of public opinion, is the main sanction it is only operative when

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XIV

We have tried to show how distribution depends on oecology and how the lines of political cleavage tend to follow distribution in relation to modes of livelihood. But consideration of oecology only helps us to understand some demographic features of Nuer tribes and tribal segments and not the nature of their structural relations. These can only be understood in terms of certain structural principles and we have tried to isolate these principles, though not, we admit, at a very deep level of analysis. The chief points we have made are here briefly summarized.

(1) Nuer attach values to their geographical distribution and these evaluations give us socio-spacial units and relate these units into a system. (2) In all such units there is evident a tendency to segment into opposed segments, and also for these segments to fuse in relation to other units. (3) The smaller is the segment the greater is its cohesion, and it is for this reason that a segmentary system exists. (4) The political system of the Nuer can only be understood in relation to a whole structure of which other peoples form part and, likewise, the character of all Nuer communities must be defined by their relations with other communities of the same order within the whole political system. (5) The social system is much wider than spheres of actual political relations and cuts across them. (6) Political values depend on more than residential relations. Political relations can be isolated and studied independently of other social systems, but they are a specific function of the whole set of social relations. These are mainly of a kinship type and the organization of kinship relations into political relations in certain situations is one of our major problems. (7) The structural relations between Nuer tribes and other peoples and between tribe and tribe are maintained by the institution of warfare and the structural relations between segments of the same tribe are maintained by the institution of the feud. (8) There is no central administration, the leopard-skin chief being a ritual agent whose functions are to be interpreted in terms of

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the structural mechanism of the feud. (9) Law is relative to the structural distance between persons and has not the same force in different sets of relations. (10) The new conditions of Arab-European intrusion have probably caused the development of prophets, with embryonic juridical functions, and greater intertribal solidarity.

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Nuer consider that lineage cleavage arises from a fundamental cleavage in the family between *gaatgwan*, children of the father, and *gaatman*, children of the mother. Where there are two wives and each has sons, the lineage bifurcates from this point. A lineage bifurcation is a polygamous family writ large. *Thok dwiel*, lineage, means this; it is 'the entrance to the hut.', the mother's hut. The tiny twigs we see in the *gol*, household, grow into the great branches of the lineages. It is for this reason that lineages are so often named after women, the mothers from whose wombs sprang the different lines of descent. As we understand the process, what happens is that certain lineage groups gain political importance and exclusiveness, becoming nuclei of tribal sections, and that only by so doing is their structural position stabilized and are the points of their bifurcation rendered fixed and permanent points of convergence in lineage structure. This explains how it is that in only a few out of a vast number of polygamous families is maternal descent structurally significant, and why the bifurcation occurs in the lineage where it occurs in the tribe.

This tendency towards co-ordination of territorial segmentation and lineage segmentation can be seen in the various stages of territorial expansion between the household and the tribe. When brothers of an influential family live in different parts of a village and gather around them a cluster of relations and dependants, these hamlet-groups are named after them and they become the point at which the lineage is likely to bifurcate. Thus, if the brothers are called Bul and Nyang, people speak of the *gol* of Bul and the *gol* of Nyang, and if later the grandchildren of one of them move to a different village site the lineage will split into two branches. Such minimal lineages as those pictured in the diagrams on pages 196–7 occupy adjacent villages, or widely separated divisions of the same large straggling village, and make separate camps along the same stretch of river or adjacent camps around a small lake. The points of divergence of lineages from clan trees are thus related to the size and distribution of inhabited sites in a tribal area.

The association of the tribal system with a clan may thus be supposed to influence the form of the lineage structure. We may further emphasize the morphological consistency between

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bably always been the same number of sets in existence at any time and these sets always have the same relative positions to each other in the system, regardless of actual groups of men composing them.

It is significant that among the Nuer, as among other East African peoples, the age-set system is the first institution to undergo rapid and great modification under European rule and that the other social systems do not appear to be affected by the changes in its constitution. This tends to confirm the opinion we have earlier expressed, that whilst the age-set system is combined with the territorial and lineage systems in the same social cadre and is consistent with them, the consistency is not an interdependence.

IV

Within the age-set system the position of every male Nuer is structurally defined in relation to every other male Nuer and his status to them is one of seniority, equality, or juniority. It is difficult to describe these statuses in terms of behaviour, because the attitudes they impose are often of a very general nature. The following points may, however, be noted. (1) There are certain ritual observances and avoidances, chiefly between members of the same set, but also between sets. The most important of these are the segregation of the sets at sacrificial feasts, to which we have referred, and the stringent prohibition on members of a set burying an age-mate or partaking of the meat of beasts sacrificed at his mortuary ceremony; but there are a number of other ritual injunctions. (2) A man may not marry, or have sexual relations with, the daughter of an age-mate, for she is his 'daughter' and he is her 'father'. Also, while a man may always have sexual relations with the daughter of one of his father's age-mates he ought not to marry her unless either his father, or her father, is dead, and then only after the parties to the marriage have exchanged beasts in atonement to the age-set of the fathers. (3) Members of the same age-set are on terms of entire equality. A man does not stand on ceremony with his age-mates, but jokes, plays, and eats with them at his ease. Age-mates associate in work, war, and in all the pursuits of leisure. They are expected to offer one

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far it is determined by specific age-set relationships. When speaking about sets senior to his own, but not that of his father or the set immediately senior to his own, a Nuer sometimes speaks about them collectively as though all their members were his fathers-in-law and their wives his mothers-in-law, for he is courting their daughters and is likely to marry one of them and so is circumspect in his dealings with their parents. Thus a *Lithgac* son of a *Maker* father regards members of the *Dangunga* set and their wives as potential fathers-in-law and mothers-in-law.

The age-set system thus influences persons through a kinship idiom and on the pattern of kinship. The sets never act corporately, but they function locally between individuals and, in ceremonial situations, between small aggregates of persons who live near to one another, for a man only has frequent contacts with those members of his set and of other sets who live in his district. No doubt relative positions in age-set structure to some extent determine behaviour between neighbours, and it can sometimes be observed that they determine it, but it is difficult to say to what extent, for men who live near one another are not only members of the same age-set or of different age-sets but are also kinsmen or affines. The age-set patterns of behaviour are, except in specific rites, of so general a nature that they cannot be isolated in a community where everyone is related in a number of different ways to everybody else. We have noted how persons who live together are always able to express their relations to one another in the language of kinship and how, when they are not actual kinsmen, they are recognized as equivalent to such by adoption or through some traditional, or mythological, connexion. The age-set stratification of all men, and by analogy all women, into groups whose inter-relations are on the pattern of family relationships is one of the ways by which community relations are expressed in kinship patterns and is comparable to the classificatory system of kinship nomenclature in its assimilation of social relations to a few elementary types. Age-relations are part of the general social ties of a kinship type which unite all persons living in a community. The members of a local group have group relations only with other groups of the same kind and it is these relations

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561 608 182 which we call political. They also have manifold contacts with one another—economic, ceremonial, food, play, and so forth—and political relations may be viewed as a specific organization of the texture of social ties, which control these contacts, in certain situations. It is this action of the age-set system, in establishing ties between members of local communities and in giving them a kinship value, that we chiefly stress in a political context rather than its indication of leadership, for outside small kinship and domestic groups the authority derived from seniority is negligible, and the sets lack leadership and administrative and judicial functions.

561 619 The age-set system has been briefly treated because of this action and also because, in the larger tribes at any rate, it is a tribal institution. It segments the male population of a tribe into stratified groups which stand in a definite relationship to one another and it cuts across territorial divisions, giving identity of status where there is political disparity and differentiating status where there is political identity. However, the political system and the age-set system do not seem to be interdependent. Both are consistent in themselves and to some extent overlap and influence one another, but it is easy to conceive of the political system existing without an age-set organization. There is evidence in East Africa that political development produces atrophy of the age-set organization. In conclusion we would again emphasize that adjacent tribes co-ordinate their sets and that the sets of any tribe are easily translated into the sets of another tribe. Initiation rites, more than anything save language, distinguish Nuer culture and give Nuer that sense of superiority which is so conspicuous a trait of their character. Only in the sense that age-sets are organized tribally and are common to all tribes can there be said to be a correspondence between the age-set system and the political system. There is no positive structural correspondence of the kind we have noted between the lineage system of dominant clans and tribal segmentation. It may be said, therefore, that whereas the political system and the lineage system of dominant clans are interdependent, the political system and the age-set systems are only a combination, in Nuer society. We may add that the common assumption that an age-set system merely by

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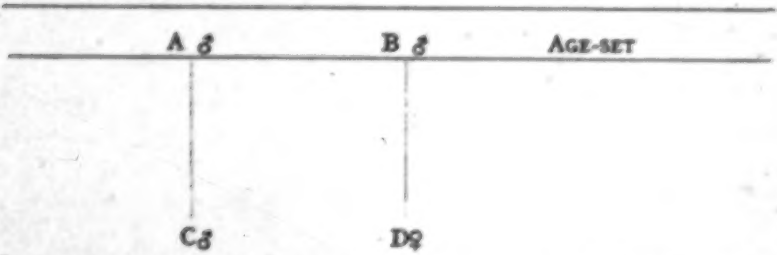
561 582 [832] goat, and Tot gave the husband's father a male sheep. It may be doubted, nevertheless, whether such a marriage would have been regarded as correct by the older generation. I was told, however, that a man would not hesitate to flirt with, or make love to, female children of his father's age-mates without intention of marrying them, and it is evident that the restriction has nothing like the same force as that on the marriage between men and the daughters of their age-mates.

DIAGRAM XXIV.



561 •182 To understand the Nuer age-set system we have to observe how it regulates the behaviour of members of a community towards one another. It acts together with the kinship system in determining everybody's attitude towards everybody else, so that the behaviour of each to each other is known beforehand, since it is evoked by their status in relation to one another. We have already seen how by a fiction which recognises adoption as true kinship and by the value attached to descent through the mother as well as through the father, a Nuer community comprises a network of interrelations of a kinship type which are spoken about in genealogical terms. These, however, leave authoritarian status largely ill-defined, and as is usual in societies where rank is unknown leadership is based on social recognition of biological differences of sex and age. In Nuerland authority is in the hands of the males and older males.

561 602 So dominant are notions of kinship among the Nuer that the age-set system is expressed in the ideology of family and kin as we have observed and tends to be spoken of as "fathers," "brother," "sons." Doubtless, this association lends weight to the institution of age-sets and makes them easy for an individual to understand and take part in. Talking to Nuer about their age-sets, one receives a marked impression that the notions associated with them are the familiar notions of family

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life. Certainly the Nuer always speaks of them in terms of family and kin. Not only does he speak of his "fathers" and "sons," but he speaks about members of age-sets senior to his own but not of his father's age-set as though they were his fathers-in-law and their wives his mothers-in-law. These peoples must be respected because their daughters are your lovers and one day may be your wives. Thus a *Lithgac* son of a *Makw* father will regard members of the *Dangwga* age-set and their wives as potential mothers- and fathers-in-law.

The analysis presented in this paper may appear difficult, perhaps unconvincing, when stated in abstract terms, but observe how daily contacts and occupations in a Nuer cattle-camp operate smoothly and how their smooth working is partly a result of social stratification by age. We have seen how the question of who shall perform tasks connected with the monotonous task of cattle-raising is settled by the clear cleavage between the duties of men and the duties of boys. In the many situations that arise in the daily life of cattle-camps, one has opportunity to see how the young give way to the old and listen without interrupting to their advice and admonition in disputes and discussions of all kinds. They will order the younger men to perform services for them and will lecture them upon shortcomings; and the extraordinary pride of a Nuer, the object of ceaseless astonishment to Europeans, no matter how long they have resided in the country, is not injured by orders and admonition from a man of a senior age-set. One observes that the frequent quarrels in a Nuer cattle-camp are between members of the same age-set, and for a man to struggle with the members of a junior age-set would be ignoble for both alike. Everybody's behaviour to everybody else is thus defined on rough, general lines in the daily range of their contacts. In your relations with A he must pay deference to you since he belongs to an age-set junior to your own. On the other hand when you meet B you must defer to his opinion and you may do as he asks you to do without losing your dignity. Boys are everybody's servants. You have left your spear in your windscreen when you have been visiting friends and you want someone to bring it to you. You look round and see C, a boy, and you tell him to go and fetch it. Then there is D, who is of the same age-set as yourself. He is your comrade and your equal. He can say anything he likes to you and you can reply to him as you like. Your equality is shown as much in your quarrels as in your fellowship. It is

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expressed in your close association, in love-making and dancing, in hunting and warfare, in mutual visiting and sharing of meals. The essence of such a system is that it should work automatically for there is no one to enforce it. You ought to behave with deference or equality or superiority to men of different age-sets, and if you do not behave towards a man as his age-status requires you to do, then you will have done the wrong thing—people will say so openly and your father and uncles will consider themselves insulted by your conduct towards a member of their age-set and you will suffer from their chagrin. That the system works is perhaps in part due to its association with kinship ideology and also to the fact that it does not have to work outside the local community where the bonds of kinship are effective. It stratifies members of the local grouping, of the village and district and cattle-camp.

Every society regulates the interaction of its members, among other ways by organising them into age-grades that are associated with the ideology of family life. The problem is: why does age become stratified into formal sets? I do not know that any satisfactory answer can be given to that question and none will be attempted here. It is pertinent to ask, however, whether there are any other means of determining community interrelations in questions of leadership and authority. From this point of view, it would be desirable to make a comparative study of what happens in neighbouring cultures like those of the Shilluk and Dinka, especially among the Shilluk where the system has almost entirely broken down, for we may suppose that it has at one time been less negligible a social influence than at present, and also in those East African societies, like the Masai, where the age-set institution has reached its highest development. But, although such questions can only be treated on the basis of comparative study we may, nevertheless, note once more the absence of any very decided political status among the Nuer. Nor does a kinship system provide an adequate means of denoting leadership. Even in the narrowest type of kinship relations, that between brothers, authority is not an integral part of patterns of kinship behaviour. And we have to remember that wielding of authority is always a difficult matter in any society, and where it is not based on open restraint this is due to a clear cleavage between those who order and those who obey, each person knowing at once to which party the other belongs. Among the Nuer it can hardly be said that leadership and authority are highly

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developed, but in so far as they are present, they derive their sanction to a large extent from the age-set system. We must also remember that age-sets are organised tribally and are one of the institutions common to all members of the same tribe and may, therefore, be supposed to act as a unifying agency in the loose political life which we have seen to characterise Nuer tribes. As much as language, moreover, it is participation in a Nuer age-set that stamps a man as a Nuer and distinguishes him from Dinka, Shilluk, Anuak, and other peoples. When you have six weals running across your forehead you are a real Nuer, a member of the finest nation on earth. The Nuer does not doubt his superiority over the other folk and is intensely proud of the marks on his forehead which prove his nationality.

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PRIESTS AND PROPHETS

I have discussed the question stated that in old days, before *deng*, the first of the air-spirits to fall to earth, entered into men towards the end of last century there were no prophets at all, only the *kuar*, the priests. I have suggested in an earlier book that their appearance might be explained by historical events—the expansion of the Nuer and, more particularly, the threat to their independence by northern Arab slavers, the Mahdists, and Anglo-Egyptian rule, which required, if it were to be met, greater political unity and the development of political authority. This view accords also with what has been said in general about the relation of Nuer religious conceptions to their social structure. It is possible that some of the prophets might have established political authority and leadership overriding local loyalties and sectional interests had they been allowed to, for prophetic powers tend to become hereditary, passing to whichever son is susceptible. Thus the mantle of Ngundeng fell upon his son Gwek, who was more a political, and less a religious, figure than his father had been; and the mantle of Deng Leaka fell upon his son Dwal. The Government effectively stopped development in this direction. Direct British administration was instituted, and no more influential prophets emerged. On the other hand, far from the idea of spirits—air-spirits, totemic and totemistic spirits, nature sprites, and fetish spirits—dwelling among men having been eclipsed it has spread more widely and in ever-increasing variety. This was already beginning to happen when I was in Nuerland (in the years 1930, 1931, 1935, and 1936), but the Nuer of the areas in which I carried out most of my research, the Lou and eastern Jikany tribes, had heard of only a few of the many spirits already familiar to those to the west of the Nile. So strongly have they now invaded these territories that, Dr. Lienhardt tells me, they have established themselves among the Anuak, who live yet farther to the east and had no knowledge of them as late as 1940. If my interpretation of the emergence and proliferation of new religious conceptions in terms of structure and structural developments is correct it would follow that we have here a counterpart in religious thought to an increasing fragmentation and individualization amounting by this time to a breakdown of the traditional social order.

Historical circumstances have brought the Nuer into closer communication at all points with foreign ideas; and the breakdown of their traditional way of life and the taking over of some

16: Evans-Pritchard E-5 (1931, 1936) 1956
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792 776 ●182 [177] of these ideas are part of the same process of change. As we have noted, they say of their air-spirits which inspire their prophets, and also in general of spirits which have fallen from above to earth, that they took them over from foreign peoples, mostly from the Dinka; and it is also possible that, as Mr. H. C. Jackson suggests,[1] there is a relation between the appearance of prophets among the Nuer and the spread of Dervish influence, for it was about the time of the Mahdist upheaval that their first prophets arose, and I was expressly told by one Nuer that the first spirit they heard of entering men was *madi* (?al-Mahdi) in the lands of the north and that afterwards they heard of *deng* and then of other spirits.

792 182 Although the emergence of prophets can be interpreted in terms of historical events and structural changes just as the priesthood can be interpreted in terms of the functioning of the traditional tribal system, the prophet's significance for an understanding of Nuer religious thought calls for comment not required in the case of the priest. The rise of prophets and the increase of every other kind of 'owners' of spirits may indeed be a response, first to a challenge and then to disintegration, but it is a response made within a set of religious conceptions and has, therefore, a significance for the study of those conceptions without regard to whatever it may have been which occasioned the response. That the response should have taken a religious form does not surprise us, for that has been a common enough reaction to European rule in Africa and elsewhere, and the Nuer are, in any case, conspicuously religious. What claims our attention is rather the kind of religious form it took, a form which is at the same time both a development of potentialities in their traditional religion and a change in its character. We have seen in an earlier chapter how the Nuer notion of Spirit lends itself to refraction without limits. If this had not been so all the new spiritual conceptions which have arisen in the course of the last two generations could not have come into existence without entirely changing the character of Nuer religious thought. As it is, they have partly changed it.

[1] Op. cit., p. 91.